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AN
ADDRESS
TO THE
Right Hon. HENRY GRATTAN,
ON THE
PRESENT STATE
OF THE
ROMAN CATHOLICS
OF IRELAND.

BY
ONE OF THAT BODY.

Nihil habet nec fortuna tua majus quam ut possis, nec natura
tua melius quam ut velis conservare quamplurimos.

CIC. OR. PRO LIG.

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A N

A D D R E S S , &c.

AN Irishman who feels the degradation of his country in his own unmerited oppression, naturally looks up to you, if not for redress, at least for consolation. To you, Sir, he owes that the place of his nativity is not still an object of reproach.—Others have shared with you; a few, perhaps, he in particular who presides in your house, have taken the lead of you in retailing to the country its natural advantages; its agriculture, manufactures and commerce: but the source of its prosperity is peculiarly yours; its constitution, its spirit, its dignity. The energy with which you asserted its rights, you transfused into the public mind; and roused to a sense of their consequence, your countrymen have been taught to respect themselves in respecting their connections, and to temper and exalt their loyalty by every ennobling sentiment that characterises a free, generous and independent people.

With such claims on public confidence, with such talents for public good, will you not attend, shall you not applaud, Sir, the requisition of two millions of Irishmen, who must be the destruction of the country, if they did not feel themselves entitled to a participation in the blessings you have acquired for it? Your character, Sir, as a statesman, as the friend of your country, is involved in the question. If the great body of the people continue disqualified for the enjoyment of freedom; you have not served your country; you have, though unintentionally, injured it.

While the old system, I will not call it constitution, prevailed, we might have been considered, what perhaps in fact we were, a province of the British empire. In this view two millions of the miserable inhabitants of the conquered province were, agreeably to the *Christian* maxims that governed Europe, *justly* sacrificed to the *holy* apprehensions of ten or twelve millions of *true believers*. The province, 'tis true, was a scene of desolation, but the empire flourished, and was supposed even to have benefited by the partial misery. There was at least something of consistency in this; it had the sanction of precedent, and was not, in the ruling opinions of the times, without some appearance of political expediency. But, Sir, from the moment you established the independence of your country; when, by a happy concurrence of circumstances, you restored to Ireland her imperial diadem; the proscribing principle, as exerted here, lost the prop
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of system, and could not plead even the semblance of policy. For what, Sir, is the state where the majority of the people are proscribed?—a state which is professedly, in a considerable degree, popular—where the majority of the people have no political right?—where, from the nature of the constitution, political rights, operating through a vast variety of legal descriptions; such as constituents of a part of the legislature, members of corporations, of certain honourable and lucrative professions, of juries, and a thousand petty offices, perpetually affect and frequently commix with and involve the civil rights of almost every man in the kingdom; and where, of consequence, the extinction of political right, in many instances destroys, in all diminishes, the enjoyment of civil rights? Sir, in such a state there must be but two great parties, the governing and governed: they are parties indeed! not only distinguished, but opposed. And let us disguise it as we may; force, the atrocious force of despotism, is the principle of the one; and the silent tear of the suffering Gentoo, the indignant murmur of conscious but unavailing worth, and the fallen listless torpor of a beaten slave the varied and miserable refuge of the other.

What, in effect, are political rights in the few to the exclusion of the many? You know it, Sir; they are engines of oppression to a party, not organs of just freedom to the body of the people; they constitute in those who possess them, not liberty, but power. For what then have you struggled?—what at last have you gained? A transfer of power,
and

and an increase of it to a party, and consequently a diminution of *virtuous* liberty, even in that party. For the one is impaired in proportion as you add to the other, even in those in whose favour the addition is made : power in the hands of a *party*, and assuming its *spirit*, is dark, jealous, selfish and suspicious ; it narrows the heart, and naturally tends to tyranny : but liberty, genuine liberty, expands the soul and embraces all its kind ; sacred in its source, honourable in its views, with justice for its basis, and respecting the individual only in his relation to the whole, it is ever open, generous, communicative and unreserved. They are professedly hostile to each other, and seldom, if ever, coexist in the same breast, at least to any considerable degree. In a single person, or even in a few, power is never without some provision or other against extreme abuse ; the fear that it inspires, serves also to check it : but if extended to a multitude, without attention to rank or talents ; it is pernicious indeed ! In this case being perfectly unrestrained, or possessing only that portion of fear which irritates, but does not repress, it will generally produce its natural effects ; it will insult, it will crush, it will destroy : blending with their habits, connections and prejudices, it will form a phalanx of petty tyrants, who feel their consequence chiefly in the oppression of their fellow-creatures. Yes, Sir, the sum of your boasted acquisitions, confined in their effects and operations as they now are, is to have added a new lash to the whip of the slave-driver.

Look,

Look, Sir, to the state of the country, behold in two millions of Irishmen, of your countrymen, the human face divine ground down to a state of degradation and misery, which in such a country, and with such inhabitants, the vilest system of oriental despotism operating through a single tyrant could never produce. Many circumstances have had, no doubt, their influence in contributing to this calamity; but the great source of the general misery is to be discovered only in the system of general proscription. See in the different parts of the kingdom the dreadful operation of this horrible system: in the most barren and inhospitable province, where its blasting influence does not generally obtain; a cheering appearance of public prosperity evinces the happy effects of an equal distribution of rights: whilst in the other parts of the kingdom, most of them not inferior in fertility, situation and climate, to the most favoured spots on earth, chill * pe-

* The extreme misery of this ill-fated race is still a frequent theme in both houses of parliament. The L. C. in the debate on the bill for the cultivation of trees, describes the poor tenantry, a people *powdered down to the worst extremity of misery*. Mr. C. Beresford, in his speech on Mr. Grattan's bill for the improvement of barren lands, informs the house that the *finest lands of the county of Waterford are almost without the appearance of any cultivation*: and Major Doyle on the other side of the question, declares the situation of this miserable people *worse than that of the most savage tribes on earth, some of which he has had an occasion of seeing*, and in support of his assertion, he mentions a circumstance that is proof indeed! *at the approach of the hearth-money collector, it is not unusual to see these poor creatures throw down their butts, to avoid paying the tax!*—It is hoped for the credit of humanity that the collection is generally made in summer.

nury and hopeless depression are the melancholy evidences of the prevalence of this system. Sir, there is no life, no spirit, no energy in the country, no common interest, no national dignity, no public weal. Every incentive to industry, that exceeds the supply of the immediate wants of nature, is blasted, and, if this system continues, ought perhaps to be destroyed in those, whom, when successful, it renders more sensible of their dishonoured state: This, Sir, you know was the policy interwoven for generations with the system, and perfectly suited to it; the natural effects followed, degradation and misery to the wretched inhabitants, ruin and desolation to the face of the land.

'Tis idle, Sir, to look for prosperity in a nation subject to the malignant influence of this debasing scheme. The cause of the distemper is evident, its violence and extent are deeply and universally felt; it strikes at life, it pervades the whole frame; it is too strong for palliatives, too general for topical applications. Nothing short of a removal of the cause will cure this atrophy and restore the body politic to its vital functions. This, Sir, is one of the few subjects that occurs in public life, on which among all good men there can be but one opinion: here genuine patriotism may expatiate freely, and in establishing a character that would shed lustre on the first of men, gratify, at the same time, the best and finest feelings of the human heart. It is the luxury of benevolence to feel on such a theme; and to compass its object must unite the best exertions of every true friend to his country and to his kind.

But

But here, Sir, an host of prejudices and passions must be combated. The religion of this people disqualifies them for the enjoyment of liberty in a state which has adopted a different religion for the members of its government : and to extend to them the power and emoluments that flow from the exercise of political rights ; would be to injure those good subjects who have been so long in the exclusive possession of them, as justly to consider them their natural inheritance.

To enter into a laboured justification of the civil tendency which the religious principles of the people in question might have in the circumstances alluded to ; would be, in the present period of general information, to insult your understanding, and a mockery on the law of the land. Look, Sir, at your statute-book ; in the preamble of the first of Mr. Gardiner's acts for the partial repeal of the penal laws, such Roman Catholics as had taken or shall take the prescribed oath of allegiance are declared to be dutiful and loyal subjects. And this declaration must appear to every honest mind to be perfectly founded : for in that oath, Sir, they have disclaimed, in the fullest and most solemn manner, every undue † interference of their religious creed,

† It is among the excellencies of the Christian religion, and the internal evidences of its divine origin, that it promotes the real interests of this life, while it seems to respect only those of the other. In this view it may be justly said to interfere with and affect the social state ; but it is by its beneficence, in exalting by a strong sense of duty, every species of good and referring it to the great Author and Exemplar of all good.

with their principles and duties as subjects and citizens. To object then their religion as a disqualification for any right of citizenship in any circumstances, or under † any form of government, is unfounded; and in the case before us, not only unfounded, but in some sense illegal. At present, Sir, when the sacred rights of conscience are so well understood, when the discrimination between spiritual and temporal concerns is so perfectly ascertained and so generally known, the Roman Catholic may be still considered by the theologian who differs from him as superadding to the doctrines and duties of the gospel: but his religion, confined as it is to its proper objects, looking only to things *that are not of this world*, is placed beyond the reach of political operation: and the statesman who, contrary to its nature, drags it into notice, for the purpose of punishing it, must be actuated by the bigot-

† Montesquieu is of opinion (and this opinion has been inserted with some parade in a late work to serve a particular purpose), that the Roman Catholic religion is best adapted to monarchical, and the Protestant to republican forms of government. But it is among the acknowledged mistakes of this elegant and informed writer, that, like his countryman Des-Cartes, he endeavoured to accommodate facts to system, not to deduce system from facts. What a subversion of his favourite doctrines of the reciprocal influence and connexion of climate, religion and government in the despotism of Prussia and the democracy of France? The truth is, that the Christian religion in any of its known and settled forms, will perfectly suit any mode of government; and that the Roman Catholic religion, in particular, reckons among its sincere followers as enlightened citizens, as true patriots and as generous votaries of just liberty, as any other religious description whatever.

ed spirit of an inquisitor, or the more dishonest and more destructive principle of a Machiavel.

But in fact, Sir, the reign of religious bigotry is gone. After more than two centuries of bitter contention, we have at length discovered that no true religion can possibly exist without the * love of our neighbour; that in the sphere of this duty every child of Adam is our neighbour; that the first law of the gospel is to love our enemies from our hearts, and render good to all, even to those that hate us. If the narrow spirit of party appears still to influence different denominations of Christians, it is now in the many, what it was always in the few; it is no longer an undue attachment to religion which scorns its aid, and of which it is equally the perversion and scandal: it is the wretched pretext for gratifying those passions, which to correct and subdue is a principal design of religion. Yes, Sir, we are enlightened; but are we proportionably mended? If we were, would it not be sufficient for the purposes of just policy and public good, that the monopolists of the honour, spirit and dignity of the nation should know, that the good of their country, that common humanity, that sacred justice demands that the rights of citizenship be imparted to every dutiful and loyal subject. Should they not attend to the inspiring voice of the genius of the country, who calls to happiness without limit or alloy through union and liberty? and who speaks in accents to be

* We have religion enough to hate, but not enough to love one another. SWIFT.

heard, from the channel to the ocean, the eternal and impressive truth; that the benefits of a constitution professing itself to be in a great measure popular, be not oppressively withheld from, nor the interest in its conservation improvidently denied to a considerable body of the people. But, Sir, the policy that would continue this degrading monopoly in its present confined state, is not only selfish and injurious to the nation at large, but eludes the object it would idly grasp, and in a great measure defeats itself. For a communication of rights, augmenting the general prosperity, will proportionally augment the just advantages that flow from the liberal enjoyment of them: these advantages will be no longer the film that covers and increases the corruption within; they will be the bloom of health, and the animating expression of manly vigour; they will be the efflorescences of public freedom, and the glad ovations of general happiness. Yes, Sir, the comprehensive plan that constitutes every good subject a citizen by uniting the whole in one common interest, will defecate, liberalize, and multiply all those objects of laudable ambition, which a good man and an enlightened citizen will value only in as much as they are truly constitutional; that is, when they are enjoyed, not for the private or selfish advantage of the individual or a party, but in trust for, subordinate to, connected with and effective of public and general good.

But has the established church nothing to fear from the emancipation of this people? It is painful, Sir, in the extreme to suppose that such a question

tion should ever be asked. For what does it imply?—But respect for our nature, and reverence to religion, forbid us to admit for a moment the unworthy supposition. It is enough to remark, that any establishment circumstanced and connected as that of the national church, must derive increase of security from the increasing civilization of the country; and that a mild and liberal church-government, interwoven in its political capacity with the very constitution of the state, must in that capacity ever command the respect and support of every one, who, sharing the benefits of our happy constitution, feels it his interest as well as his duty to preserve it in every part unaltered and unimpaired.

As to the government, Sir, it is surely unnecessary to say, that to it the improvement of the country and the public felicity are primary objects, not only of countenance but support. It would be idle to vindicate the sentiments and dispositions of the Irish Roman Catholics towards that government: if they were any way deficient in this respect, they must not only be ill-affected, but ungrateful: for such among them as have any thing, feel and acknowledge that it is to the humanity of government they are principally indebted for the little they possess. But to the illustrious spring of that government, to the magnanimity of their sovereign, to the fostering benignity of the father of all his people, their veneration and attachment are as fixed and as fond as those of the most favoured among his subjects; their loyalty, Sir, is not only duty,
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but sentiment; it is the compound expression of reverence to rank, of obedience to authority, of love to goodness, and of gratitude to beneficence.

Although the justice, nay, the necessity, of a great public measure be generally agreed on; it may still be difficult to determine how far in the present state of persons and opinions, it may with propriety be carried into effect. On this head, Sir, to speak with precision, must suppose a more detailed knowledge of the map of the country than the writer possesses. It is evident, however, that something substantial, something generous should be done. Without presuming to dictate on so delicate a subject, he will just solicit your permission to suggest, that the extension of the great right of elective franchise, which under a constitution like ours, is the only sure basis of every other right, civil, religious and political, should be the leading subject of enlightened and benevolent discussion. In cities and populous towns, where people of all descriptions mingle, and are better known to each other; a very trifling difference, if indeed any be judged necessary, should be established for the exercise of this right between the Roman Catholic and his fellow-citizens. But in the counties, where a more considerable degree of separation obtains among all ranks, the qualification of a Roman Catholic freeholder might be fixed at twenty pounds per ann. This would prevent the shock of a sudden revolution in the public mind, and the † inconvenience that might be incurred by

† These inconveniences however must be less felt, as the actual exercise of the right of election will not take place in any material degree for six or seven years.

throwing open at once an unlimited right of franchise to a large body of people, numbers of whom, from long depression and extreme misery †, may be supposed as yet unprepared for the due exercise of it. The operation it would have on the constitution of the house of commons must be so very trifling, that, all § circumstances considered, it may be fairly presumed that the popular representation as it now stands would be very immaterially affected by it. But it would remove the stigma of disgrace from a numerous body of the people; it would gradually prepare them for their just rank in society; and by holding out the possible enjoyment of political liberty, without the stings and infamy of a sacrifice of conscience; it would communicate that general spirit, which alone is the great spring of all public happiness. In short, Sir, to borrow an expression from a celebrated political writer, some presiding principle, some prolific energy should be adopted;

† Very few of this description possess even the ordinary qualifications of property.

§ When it is considered, that nearly two thirds of the commons are returned by the proprietors of boroughs, among whom there is not one Roman Catholic; that the great majority of members for counties and cities are gentlemen of the first property, connexions and popularity; that the number of Roman Catholics in counties possessing freeholds of twenty pounds per ann. is, in proportion to the other freeholders, exceedingly small; and that many of those who have influence, exert already that influence for a favourite candidate: when all these circumstances are taken into account, the above statement will appear pretty just.

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it might be left for some time to its own operation; and the experience of its effects honestly attended to and fairly stated, would best justify to the nation, and to the world, the expedience of its continuance, its extension or limitation.

F I N I S

